



# Singing Tree Family Handbook



"Keep a green tree in your heart,  
and perhaps a singing bird will come."

-Proverb

## Philosophy Mission Statement

At Singing Tree, I want to cultivate curiosity and a love for learning through open-ended play in a Reggio-inspired learning environment, nourishing the imagination and creativity with storytelling, music-making, singing, and authentic process-based art.

A young child's brain grows rapidly. Reading, storytelling, singing, dancing, playing, and making music stimulates their minds, fosters a love of learning, develops language skills, and lays a foundation for later reading success. Children who are read to also discover that books are fun, become good listeners, understand their world better, and experience beautiful art in picture books. During play is when "real" learning happens. This is when children act out what has been modeled to them, process new information, and practice their newly gained skills. Play is not just wasted time, it is arguably the most important form of childhood behavior specific to learning. I believe that if you teach young children the "magic" of creating beauty and expression with their own hands and voices, they become individuals that believe in remaking their world with their own hands and voices. I believe that if you teach young children the crafts and stories and music of other cultures, they become individuals connected to a world beyond their own culture. I believe if you integrate hands on creativity, and an ethic of sustainable living, you help inspire a generation that will actually go out and affect change that unites and may perhaps save this shared planet. I am not just a facilitator, but a fellow play artist creating something that might be called magical. This magic doesn't just engage the young audience, it opens their minds to discovery with lasting effect. I particularly want to stress the term "lasting

effect." This is what I like to call the "magic" of a playful program. This is more than just a way to make things fun. It is a way of transforming the program into a place and event that transports children to their own special adventure. I am a fellow traveler on this journey, just as surprised and amazed as the children are. Children are in the moment. Their beginner's mind allows each moment to be an opportunity to really take in their surroundings. Every found leaf is a treasure, every rock upturned is a new surprise, and every corner is a mystery waiting to be explored.

I want children to leave for the day with a deep appreciation for the human connection we experience in a program together, and hopefully a deeper appreciation for the beauty of the natural world that surrounds us. If I can inspire children to honor these connections then positive social and ecological change is attainable. I am not so much reading to them, as reading and singing and dancing and playing with them. I am not merely telling stories and singing songs and sharing art to tell a bigger story. We are becoming that bigger story together. I will cherish every smiling child's face entrusting their precious childhood time with me. I will look into their eyes and give them an offering of my heart by smiling back. I will be there with them in their moment, playing, singing, dancing, creating, and sharing stories. We will be of all of our minds together. We will become Our Story.

## Reggio-Inspired Learning Environment

### 100 Languages

"The child  
is made of one hundred.

The child has  
a hundred languages  
a hundred hands  
a hundred thoughts  
a hundred ways of thinking  
of playing, of speaking.

A hundred always a hundred  
ways of listening  
of marveling of loving  
a hundred joys  
for singing and understanding  
a hundred worlds  
to discover  
a hundred worlds  
to invent  
a hundred worlds  
to dream.

The child has  
a hundred languages  
(and a hundred hundred hundred more)"

\* An excerpt from the poem "100 Languages" by Loris Malaguzzi \*

Reggio is based on the belief that humans are born with many forms of expression—"languages"—available to them. Many forms of schooling only develop literacy in three of these languages: reading, writing, and arithmetic. Reggio seeks to provide acknowledgement of and opportunities to develop as many of these "languages" as possible. The Reggio model recognizes the environment as a powerful teacher; thus, Reggio environments are carefully designed with the goals of sparking inspiration, encouraging curiosity, and facilitating interpersonal activities.

Singing Tree has the view of the child as powerful, competent, and full of potential and recognizes the environment as a teacher and the emphasis on the importance of social relationships. The space arrangement and aesthetic qualities are a crucial component to Singing Tree's learning environment. Art materials, loose parts, and toys are displayed in beautiful arrangements and have been carefully chosen to be aesthetically pleasing, natural materials, stimulate the senses, open-ended, explorative, create wonder, entice curiosity, interesting and inviting. The learning environment is staged to provoke play, stimulate thinking, support creativity, ignite curiosity, encourage exploration and test theories. There is no pre-determined outcome, rather the child leads their own learning through their own drive of curiosity.

At Singing Tree, you will find a lot of loose parts, light, mirrors, and beauty. I have collected a large variety of loose parts made from various materials, and they have carefully been chosen to have a full range of qualities- some may be natural, man-made, translucent, reflective, opaque, solid, smooth, soft, bumpy, etc. Loose parts are open-ended, and can easily be manipulated by small hands. They spark many different forms of play in children. Each week, on the light table and nature table, there will be a new provocation (provocation means to provoke play with beautiful materials, and a beautiful set-up) with loose parts to invite play. On the light table, children learn through play about properties of light. With



mirrored surfaces throughout the space, children are learning through play properties of reflection. Each child approaches provocations in many different ways- For example, one child may explore a provocation through narrative play and tell a story with the loose parts, whereas another child may mathematically/scientifically approach this same provocation and sort, classify, count and name loose parts. There is no pre-determined way to explore the Singing Tree learning environment- all forms of play are welcomed and encouraged!

## **Playing With Loose Parts**

Loose parts are materials that are open-ended and that can be moved, carried, combined, redesigned, lined up, and taken apart and put back together in many ways. The idea of 'loose parts' uses materials to empower a creative imagination. The more materials and individuals involved, the more ingenuity that takes place.

At Singing Tree, we will play with many small loose parts such as marbles, pebbles, pinecones, acorn caps, etc. Children will be supervised and reminded of safety, but to be ready for this learning environment, your child **MUST** understand that objects do not go into their mouth or body. You know your child best, so please take this into consideration when considering my program. I will not be held liable for your child consuming objects.

## **Sing Into Learning!**

If there is one passion of mine that fills my every empty space it is music and singing. Singing is such a beautiful way to connect with children. We sing our way through the Singing Tree day... We sing for joyful self-expression. We sing for communal bond. We sing to reinforce the rhythm of the day. We sing to gently guide transitions in the day. We sing to bring reverence into our space. We sing to be engaged in the natural world around us and to celebrate the seasons. We sing for language acquisition and word play. We sing as a tool to reinforce self regulation, grounding, and calming. I sing as a proactive and peaceful way to redirect chaotic energy play in the classroom into productive play.

Singing is powerful. Music and singing powers the brain! Simply singing with a child connects neural pathways, and increases the ability to retain information. Music and singing builds a strong sense of rhythm, which leads to a better ability to understand and produce language. Singing develops spatial reasoning, which allows children to recognize patterns and later helps in problem-solving. Songs are rich in vocabulary and by nature build phonological awareness.

I use music to influence children in positive ways. Utilizing music, I can change a mood, stimulate creativity, and direct energy toward movement or stillness. Music is a powerful tool to help children transition from one activity to another. Throughout the program day, we use music in various forms such as community singing, dance to played music, making music with a variety of instruments, and instruments played by me to signal transition time. It is a beautiful way to gently guide the children. Something magical happens when everyone sings as a cohesive group. A song is a vehicle. Oxytocin is released when people sing in community, which bonds people together and then trust is built.

Repeating the same songs give children security, and memories that can be called on to comfort for a lifetime.

The songs we sing at Singing Tree have been carefully selected to instill a sense of community, love and respect for nature, love and respect for self, and fun to sing! We sing songs that celebrate Mother Earth, the seasons, weather, celestial songs, magical fairy songs, uplifting songs, celebratory songs, songs of reverence, silly songs, breath-work songs, calming/grounding songs, songs that instill positive self-affirming themes and authentic connection.

## **Atelier & Creative Process Art**

The word "Atelier" comes from the French word meaning the studio or workshop. It is a place for children to create, imagine, play and construct. An atelier is a space dedicated to providing children materials for original thinking and art making. It can be a place of experiencing wonder. It is an opportunity to share special techniques of art making with children so that they have more access to expressing their ideas and thoughts. When you think of your atelier as a place for children to research and experiment - it is not so much about the making of an art "product" as it is about the discovery of mediums and materials as a means to expressing ideas.

At Singing Tree, I believe strongly in process-based art for young children. I will provide children with high-quality art materials for creative exploration, and children will be given the opportunity to explore them in their own unique way. There is no pre-determined outcome, and no emphasis on the finished product. In other words, there will be no "push" for a child to make something just to take



home and show, and no "crafts" where everyone's art is just "cut-and-paste-and-all-looks-the-same." Many finished pieces will likely come home with your child, AND for some children, squeezing glue onto paper, or mastering the skill of cutting paper with scissors etc. is what fascinates a child most- and these interests are crucial for a child to build their own confident creative knowledge. The focus is on the experience the child is having through the process of exploring the materials in their own way. Each child's "finished" piece will be as unique as they are. On the large community table, a new process art experience will be offered each week for the children to explore if they wish. Offerings are out for a whole week, so that children can re-visit their previous work, and/or create multiple pieces. We have a dedicated shelf area for children to place unfinished work that they would like to re-visit at a later time. This allows children to expand upon a piece of art over a period of time.

#### A Few Examples of High Quality Art Materials We Explore:

Beeswax Crayons (both stick and block)

Beeswax Modeling

Natural Clay

Wool Fiber

Oil Pastels

Chalk Pastels

Drawing Chalk

Tempera Paint

Watercolor Cakes

Liquid Watercolors

Watercolor Pencils

Textured Rubbing Plates  
Collage Materials  
Homemade Play Dough  
Wooden Textured Rollers & Tools  
Natural Beads

A Few Examples of Process-Based Art Exploration:

Painting on Acrylic Mirrors  
Wet-Felting with Wool  
Sewing  
Modeling with Beeswax, Clay, and homemade play dough  
Salt crystal painting  
Wet-on-Wet Painting with Watercolors  
Chalk Drawing  
Oil Pastel/Watercolor Resists  
Beading  
Book Making  
Fairy "Potion" Making  
Painting at Art Easel  
Observational Drawing  
"Tinker" Creations  
Sensory/Mess Play  
Buddha Boards  
Wood Work  
Temporal Art with Natural Items

## Observational Drawing

Throughout the Singing Tree year, there will be an abundance of opportunities for children to explore observational drawing. Observational drawing helps young children observe and reflect upon what they see and how they see it. We talk a lot about using our senses to explore what is before our eyes. We use our sense of eyesight (sometimes with the aid of a magnify glass), our sense of smell, and our sense of touch with hands to capture all of the details we want in our drawings. We draw what our eyes see, and what our hands feel..... we ask and ponder questions: "What texture do you feel?", "What does it smell like?", "Which part will you start with?", "What are you noticing?", "How can you show that in your drawing?", "What else do you see?", "Let's look again.", "Tell me about this part", "What will you draw next?", "What shape do you see?", "What are the lines like?" Magnify glasses are available so that children can observe and capture all of the details they want in their drawing. This really slows them down in the process, and allows them to take the time to notice more details.

Sometimes it is a more formal invitation for observational drawing on the community art table. I often display gifts from nature such as pumpkins, gourds, leaves, flowers, herbs, etc. in beautiful arrangements on mirrors. We capture these drawings utilizing permanent markers and sometimes watercolors. Observational drawing is also sometimes sparked by an inspiration in the moment while we are outside exploring and we come upon a delightful tree frog or a lady bug. Children have the option of grabbing a clipboard and drawing materials to capture the delight before them.

Observational drawing is an excellent opportunity to introduce rich vocabulary words and concepts such as: observation, recording observations, the

five senses, magnify glass, in-focus (clear), out of focus (blurry), details, plus descriptive words (such as slimy, bumpy, smooth, fuzzy, soft, etc.).

### **"Tinker" Area**

The "Tinker" area is an open-ended creative construction zone. Creations may just look like a pile of "recyclables" at first glance, but these creations are very meaningful to the children who create them. Children are provided with interesting recycled and found objects, lots of "tools" (scissors, tape, wire, pipe cleaners, etc.), a lot of time, and then asked, "what would you like to make, and what would you like to use to make it?" The children beam with joy at given the opportunity to dive into the supplies and use them in any way they can imagine. For some children, they spend a significant amount of time just exploring the properties of the materials. For example, "what happens if I try to glue a piece of wire to a plastic cup, will it hold?" This is a very important part of the experience. Children are building a working knowledge for themselves as they better prepare to eventually create something to "show." Other children may be deeply focused on creating something specific in their imagination. All children are deeply satisfied by this opportunity.

### **Sensory/Mess Play**

Slimy, gooey, smooth, bumpy, sticky equals fun and meaningful play for children! Sensory play is an opportunity to experience the world using the senses. The sensory bins will be filled with a variety of interesting materials that will rotate throughout the year. Some examples of the materials offered are sand (wet

and dry), kinetic sand (sand that moves), water play (plain, sudsy, and colored), water beads, oobleck, Zen garden, rocks and pebbles, soil, seasonal themed explorations, and bird seed (fed to the wild birds after played with). There will also be tools offered to allow the children to experience the material in new and sometimes surprising ways. Tools could include things such as scoops, shovels, colander, funnels, tongs, figurines, sifter, slotted spoon, and more.

### **Buddha Boards- Temporal Art**

Our Buddha Boards are an opportunity for a temporal art experience. These slate boards are painted on using a natural bristle brush and water. It is meditation and temporal art combined! The children often call their friends over to “witness” their creation, then slowly watch their creation fade as the water slowly evaporates. This serves as an introduction to the concept of temporal art (art that does not last and cannot be taken home), and appreciating the beauty of creation for creation’s sake, and the art before us... In. That. Moment. We expand upon this concept throughout the year with other forms of temporal art with natural materials.

### **Play, Play, PLAY!**

“How do children learn if you are not “teaching” them formally academic subjects?”

Learning is natural and happening all the time. Babies learn to crawl, walk, and talk without being explicitly taught these things. They look at who and what exists in the world around them, copy and experiment with what they see, practice

and learn the skills they need to grow in independence and connectivity to others. In learning communities that value authenticity and collaboration, it's inevitable that we will teach and learn from each other. I don't sort knowledge into traditional subject areas, as doing so discourages learners from interdisciplinary thinking and exploring innovative applications they may invent. Learning isn't about amassing data; it's about making connections, deepening understanding, solving problems, creating, and sharing.

It is through creative, open-ended play that young children develop the problem-solving, relational, motor, fluency in physical and emotional risk management, and creative thinking skills that they will need throughout life. Academic skills are not explicitly taught at this age, but a strong foundation is laid through the rich language and repetition of stories, music, poetry, finger-plays, movement, imaginative play, time spent in nature, celebration of the seasons, and through artistic and sensory experiences. To educate themselves well, children need great amounts of free time — to make friends, explore, play, get bored and overcome boredom. They need time for fleeting interests, and to immerse themselves deeply in activities that engage their passions. They also need space — to roam, explore, get away, and experience the sense of independence and power. A great amount of learning, growing, feeling, and experiencing happens in free play and that is a huge part of how people thrive, both in developing a sense of self and in building relationships. Play helps us to develop a sense of self, belonging, community, improved communication, problem-solving skills, and to respect one another's ideas; and to find ways to fit our ideas within a community of conflicting and overlapping needs.

The drive to play serves educative purposes complementary to those of curiosity. While curiosity motivates children to seek new knowledge and understanding, playfulness motivates them to practice new skills and use those



skills creatively. Children everywhere, when they are free to do so and have plenty of playmates, spend enormous amounts of time playing. They play to have fun, not deliberately to educate themselves, but education is the side effect for which the strong drive to play came about in the course of evolution.

Observation and experimentation are a natural part of children's daily play, as are counting, creating or recognizing patterns, rhyming, memorizing nursery rhymes and songs, developing control of the hand muscles (fine motor skills), establishing balance, strength and coordination of the large muscles of the body (gross motor skills), practicing the difficult art of communicating and playing with other people, and coming up with creative solutions to a diversity of problems.

These daily play experiences provide a strong and natural foundation in literacy, numeracy, and creative thinking. Young children love to play because they are meant to be playing. Because that is how they learn and grow best. Humans are natural learners. When children get to follow their passions, they engage deeply, learning more quickly.

- Children play in physical ways, as they climb, chase, and rough-and-tumble, and that is how they develop strong bodies and graceful movement.
- Children play in risky ways, and that is how they learn to manage fear and develop courage.
- Children play with language, and that is how they become competent with language.
- Children play socially, with other children, and that is how they learn to communicate, compromise, and get along with peers.
- Children play games with implicit or explicit rules, and that is how they learn to navigate and negotiate rules.

- Children play imaginative games, and that is how they learn to think hypothetically and creatively in collaboration with others.
- Children play with logic, and that is how they become increasingly logical.
- Children play at building things, and that is how they learn to build.
- Children play with the tools of their culture, and that is how they become skilled at using those tools.

Play is not recess from education; Play IS education. Young children learn far more in play, and with far more joy, than they could possibly learn in a prescriptive classroom. For authentic play to occur, we must preserve awe and wonder, and allow for silence. Let there be some breathing space in the day so a child has a chance to just experience and be in their own body. Let there be plenty of room for their own imagination to roll. It's also crucial to leave many questions open-ended. A child is full of curiosity and will ask plenty of questions. AND, they have many amazingly wonderful ideas! It is such a gift to allow them to feel the possibilities. When you respond to questions with "I wonder..." or even "Hmmm...." you leave room for the child to come up with a response on their own. It may be a fantastical answer to their own question and that is just perfect at this age.

## **Risk Competency**

Please read the two risk competency articles, "All About Risk," and "Risk As Benefit" on my website. I see children as capable, competent, and creative who learn through a balance of intentional play, exploration, and imagination. What this means in the Singing Tree learning environment, is that children will be encouraged to take appropriate physical and social "risks" in their learning environment.

"An environment that is as safe as possible, where all possible sources of risk of harm are removed, is actually an unsafe environment because it offers little value in terms of play and learning and denies children the necessary experience to develop and practice the skills to be safe." Helen Tovy

## **All Are Welcome Here**

At Singing Tree, we celebrate and honor how we are all the same, AND how we are all different. We talk about respecting differences, celebrating diversity, and loving ourselves and others for exactly how each of us wants to show up in the world. We talk about how there are many different kinds of families- family is where you are loved. We talk about how there are lots of ways to be a kid, and to be just who you are. We talk about how each child is still discovering who they are. Our learning environment is a safe place - All are welcome here!

At Singing Tree, these "seeds" of love, respect, and kindness to ourselves and others, are planted throughout the entire year through deep conversations, carefully chosen picture books and toys that depict diverse people, abilities, and families. Picture books can be a "window" or a "mirror" for a child— allowing them a glimpse into another person's world through a "window," or allowing them a glimpse of themselves in the "mirror." I want to share an excerpt written by Debbie LeeKeenan that explains this concept beautifully:

"We all know the benefit of reading to our children from the earliest ages— reading helps babies develop language, hearing words helps brain development by building a rich network of synapses, and reading creates a caring bond between the

child and reader. But did you know another important reason to read to children is that books provide mirrors and windows to the world!

Children need to see themselves and their families reflected in the literature around them. When you see characters and images in a book that look like you and your family, it builds your confidence and self-esteem. When you do not see yourself, you wonder why does no one look like me? Is there something wrong with me? Where do I fit in? This can give you a negative message.

Books also provide a window to diversity that you and your family might not encounter on a daily basis. Books open windows and doors to new experiences, ideas and people.

When we provide our children with mirrors and windows, children notice similarities and differences. In some ways we are the same and in some ways we are different. We have different skin colors. We speak different languages. We have different abilities. We eat different foods. We have different beliefs. But we also share a common humanity. And that life is full of complexity."

At Singing Tree, it is my goal to make sure every child feels "mirrored" through picture books — as well as provide "windows" for children — and so I work diligently to incorporate a diverse collection of books into our collection (adding new books every year), as well as I borrow books from the library. We regularly enjoy picture books that effectively engage children in thinking about peace, social justice, global community, and equity for all people. While reading picture books with children, to make all children feel included in a story, I swap out (while I am reading aloud) the "typed-in-the-story" gender pronouns with just the character's name, or I swap it out to be gender-inclusive language. This is a great way for all children to feel connected to a story, every child can relate to a character in the story, and it shows that there are many ways to be a person. I welcome and

encourage families to reach out to me with any book suggestions that reflect some aspect of your family and/or child, or any other ideas you may have!

## **A Community of Kindness**

Raising a child is challenging AND rewarding- I know first hand! There are SO many choices to make on one's parenting journey. Singing Tree and enrolled families should work together to support each other during the already challenging journey of raising a child. Enrolled families may have differing opinions and parenting choices on all sorts of matters. Families do not need to agree with differing opinions, but must respect other family's choices. Let us all remember that there are MANY successful ways to raise a child. In every moment, WE are each doing the best that we can with what we have. Singing Tree IS and MUST continue to be a judgement free zone. The continued goal of Singing Tree is to bring families and their children TOGETHER to support and honor each other. Let us remember to be kind and compassionate to each other. We are a small community both at Singing Tree and in Port Townsend. Let us model for our children how to authentically be kind and judgment free of others. Let Singing Tree embody a community of kindness.

## **Practicing Life & Community Skills at Singing Tree**

Our Singing Tree preschool community has very clear, reasonable expectations and respectful boundaries. We as a group will model and practice

basic life-skills such as manners, washing hands, cleaning up after oneself, respecting the space, respecting each other, and helping others. We clean the messes we make and follow a simple conflict resolution process when those messes are relational. This instills an appreciation for community, and a sense of pride in a child's accomplishments.

## **Managing Children's Behavior**

It's hard sometimes to watch our little ones "learn" through mistakes. The real "work" for children in a preschool community is learning social boundaries. In this safe learning environment, children are able to test these boundaries and learn from their peer's responses. Through practice and example, the children will learn how to treat their peers, facilitator, space, and materials with care and respect. The most important part of a child going to preschool learning environment is not in fact the "hidden" academics learned, but the honing of crucial social skills. This means some days will be harder than others. This is normal and necessary. Challenge is the key to growth and even happiness. Shelter is a safe place, not a lifestyle.

Singing Tree has a "peace" basket which is always available whenever a child needs peace. The peace basket is equipped with an abundance of "tools" for a child to practice self-regulation, re-centering and to feel calm, such as mindful breathing boards (a tactile way a child can take calming breaths by tracing a shape with their finger on the board while inhaling and exhaling in rhythm), smooth worry stones, fidget toys, pin-wheel to make spin with their breath (a visual way to see the effects of their breath work), calming books, "worry dolls" to share their



concerns with, emotion stones, squeeze toys and more. All of the “tools” are modeled for the children regularly so that they become proficient with using them on their own as needed or with my guidance. Having a peace basket where children may access it as needed allows them to take charge of their emotions. They may quietly find a way to re-center themselves when they feel agitated, sad, angry, or frustrated. As children develop the ability to self-regulate, they become better able to engage in mindful, intentional, and thoughtful behaviors.

At Singing Tree, we spend a lot of time practicing skills and tools that will help children successfully navigate social challenges, even before a conflict begins. For instance, during lunch time, we practice deep listening, and sharing conversations with each other as we enjoy our meal. We “turn on our listening ears,” and raise our hands for a turn to share at the table. At our end of day circle, we have a short and simple meditation practice that utilizes the lovely pure tone of a singing bowl along with various deep breathing techniques specifically designed for young children. (Ex. “Smell a Flower/Blow Out a Candle,” “Blooming Flower,” and “Bowl of Soup”) The singing bowl gives the children something soothing to focus their attention on as they settle their minds and calm their bodies. They know they can only hear the bowl’s song if they are very quiet. We take several creative deep breaths, and then finish with a sprinkle of fairy wishing dust. The children close their eyes, make a silent wish, and then blow on their wishing dust to send it out into the universe to make it come true. These learned and practiced “tools” are used later when conflict arises. When I observe that a child needs to calm their mind and/or body, we have a well practiced technique to apply.

To prevent many conflicts, I begin with proactive observations of the children. During their play time, I deeply observe their play and listen to their conversations. This gives me context. For example, did that child just hit another child randomly by accident, or was there a real conflict? I often redirect play

situations that are heading for trouble beforehand. I can usually do this seamlessly without the children's awareness. One technique is to jump into the context of their play scenario and gently insert a question or conversation that leads them to ultimately redirect their own play towards a more positive direction. Once their play has been successfully redirected I gently exit the play scenario. Sometimes I sing a calming song to redirect the energy of the whole group.

When two or more children have a conflict, I always remain calm, and handle each situation with love and compassion. I never judge a child. I know all too well the importance of these learning opportunities. The children involved in the conflict and I go to a quiet spot, we sit down together in a circle facing each other, and we hold hands so that we are all connected and can make eye contact. We begin by taking several deep breaths to calm ourselves and re-center. I empower them in this step, by allowing them to choose which kind of deep breath they would like to take. Once we are calm, we use our deep listening/ sharing tools to take turns to express how each of us are feeling. I let the children know that they will each have a turn to share, while the rest of us listen. After each child has shared their side of the story, I ask each child to share what they need from the other person. Sometimes they just need to be heard, sometimes they need an apology, sometimes they need something else. We finish with a discussion on possible solutions/ compromises. Almost always, after they "hear" each other share, they come up with solutions on their own and solve the conflict without my help. I am always impressed by this! They just need to calm their minds, and truly hear their peer's words. I am of course there to help them if they become stuck in this process. I really like approaching conflicts/situations this way, because it empowers the children to use their words, be heard by others, and they get the opportunity to fix the situation themselves which has a more lasting affect. I also feel it gives them the much needed time to reflect on what just happened. Small doses of

conflict is completely normal and, more importantly, a learning opportunity to practice important social skills. All of this helps foster empathy for other children.

Every child's safety is a top priority for me. In the event a child repeatedly acts out aggressively (hitting, pushing, etc.), the child may be asked to have some quiet time in a peaceful space. This is not a "punishment," but rather an opportunity for the child to think about their own behavior and to calm themselves. Please understand that it is completely normal for children to fantasize, and act out seemingly "aggressive/combatative" play. This is different than being aggressive to another child. If a child does become dangerous to another child or themselves, the caregiver will be contacted immediately to take the child home. If over time it becomes clear that Singing Tree is not a good fit for your child, I will schedule a conference with the caregiver/s in order to discuss the next steps. It may be that Singing Tree does not have the resources to meet a particular child's personal needs. It is my goal to make the classroom safe and successful for all.

### **Talking with Facilitator**

If at any time you would like to discuss anything regarding your child and/or Singing Tree, please feel free to e-mail or call me to set-up a time to chat. During the program day (drop-off and pick-up too), my focus must remain on the children, so please refrain from approaching me at that time to discuss your child.

## **Items From Home**

Please leave personal toys, and treasures at home where they are safe from being lost or damaged. In addition, many children this age are not yet ready to share personal cherished items, and bringing them into a learning environment where items must be shared often creates unnecessary stress for the child. It also creates an unhealthy power dynamic among the children, when a child chooses to share their personal toy or treasure with some children, and also choose to exclude other children. If a child needs a stuffy to provide them with comfort during the program day, they can bring a stuffy with them, and leave their stuffy in their cubby. They can visit their stuffy in the cubby area as needed. The exception to this is when we have our Singing Tree "Show and Tell" week, where children are invited to bring in personal items from home. I will not be responsible for any personal items that are brought to school. Thank you for understanding.

## **What Should My Child Bring?**

### **Please plan to send:**

- "Oops!" bag
- A bag/backpack for child's items to be carried in
- Healthy Lunch/Snack - NO glass containers; napkin/utensils if needed
- Water Bottle- NO glass containers
- Warm/Dry Layers for outdoor exploration in changing weather
- Shoes that are easy on/off and suitable for outdoor play (no laces if possible)

- Child should wear washable/comfortable clothing they can easily manipulate to go to bathroom (ex. elastic waist pants)

With all items that you send with your child (coats, lunchboxes, backpacks, shoes, etc.), please make sure to take the time to introduce your child to their items so that they become familiar with what items are their own, and help them practice using these items. Please send your child/ren with a bag or backpack that is large enough to carry all of their own personal belongings in. The children will be packing up their cubby, and carrying their bag/backpack with them outside to set down near the pick up area. Their bags/backpacks are brought outside so that they have access to their personal items as needed while playing outside, so you may want to choose a bag that is water resistant and that closes for rainy days.

## **Lunch & Snacks**

Please provide your child with a healthy lunch and snack each day. Please, **NO GLASS** or breakable containers for the safety of the children. Items are frequently dropped, so sturdy containers are best. If your child's meal requires utensils and/or a napkin, you will want to provide those as well since I do not have any utensils in the classroom. The snack and lunch does not necessarily need to be separated- you are welcome to send all of the food into one food container/lunch box. We will sit down to eat two times during the day, and I encourage children to eat as much as they wish at each of these times. Some children are naturally more hungry during the morning meal time, and others at the later meal time. Children are also welcome to eat throughout the day as they are hungry as well.

I do not encourage candy or high sugar-content foods during the program day, since this makes children's blood sugar levels spike, and sets them up for mood swings while with peers. If your child has any food allergies, please make this clear in writing on the registration form. A child will only be served the meal that has been packed for them from home, and I will do my best to keep children from sharing food; however, this can not at all times be guaranteed. Please also communicate with your child that they should not share food while at school since this could impose a safety-issue for other children.

### **Children's Attire**

We will play, explore the outdoors (!!!), jump in mud puddles, get wonderfully dirty, and go outside in rain AND shine EVERY day, so please dress your child in appropriate, comfortable, washable clothes. If possible, please choose clothing that your child can easily manipulate independently while going to the bathroom (such as elastic-waist pants), so that a child can make it on the toilet in time and not be stuck fumbling with complicated closures. Save more complicated clothing (buttons, snaps, etc.) for home days. Your child should always come each day with a rain jacket with a hood (or at least a hat too). The weather can change often and frequently in Port Townsend, but children love to play in the rain too! In extra cold Winter months, please remember to send your child with extra warm/dry layers for the outdoors including gloves/mittens (these are often forgotten). On sunnier days, I am not allowed to apply sunscreen to your child, but you can send them with some to apply to themselves if you wish, and/or you may want to send your child with sun-shielding gear (sun hats, sun shirts, sunglasses, etc). Families have



different preferences regarding sun-protection, as well as some children could be allergic or sensitive to sunscreen, so you can choose whatever is best for your child's needs.

Sometimes art materials that claim to be "washable" in fact are not. I will do my best to prevent damage to clothing, but I cannot be responsible for damage to clothing due to stains or play, so please do not have your child wear delicate clothing, or clothing you have particular concerns about getting damaged.

### **"Oops!" Bag**

Mess happens! I want your child to feel comfortable in their clothing. In case of mess, rain, or accidents each child should be prepared with extra clothing. At the beginning of the program year, please bring an extra set of clothing for your child contained in a bag with your child's name printed clearly on the bag. Please include a full outfit, underwear, and socks. Their clothes will be stored inside the space, made available to the child as needed, and will be returned at the end of the year. If a child utilizes the extra clean clothes, I will send the used ones home to be washed, and remember to please send in a new set of extra clothing the following program day. Please also include a few non-perishable snacks (ex. granola bars) in your child's bag in case your child is extra hungry one day at school. Children's appetite can suddenly wax and wane as they grow. Due to food allergies, and dietary restrictions, I am only able to allow children to eat food that is provided by their caregiver.

## **Sign-In & Release of Children**

Please sign your child in every day, and leave me a written note if there is a change in typical pick-up plans. If someone other than regular caregivers (as indicated on your child's registration form) will be picking up your child at the end of the day, please let me know in writing at drop-off on the sign-in sheet and/or please text this to me. Please do not only tell me verbally your change of plans since my attention is on the children during morning arrival. Drop-off and pick-up times are very hectic times of day, and in writing, and/or in text is the clearest communication for me. Please include the name of who will be picking up your child, the dates they will pick-up, and their phone number in case I need to contact them. A photo ID may be requested at the time of pick-up if I have never met them before. Please inform them of this in advance so that they are prepared accordingly with an ID. This is for your child's safety. If there is someone who is NOT allowed at any point in time to ever pick up your child, please make this clear in writing on the registration form.

## **Late Arrival, Early Pick-Up, & Absent**

If your child will be late, picked up early, or absent, Please text me (or email me the night before) to let me know. This helps me to prepare and adapt accordingly to the day. If I have something special planned that day (such as a Birthday Ceremony), I may adjust the time that I do that special activity so it will not be disrupted (or missed by an absent child). Communicating all of this to me is tremendously helpful to the flow of our day. Plus, the kids notice when a friend is

missing, and so it helps put them at ease to know whether or not they will make it that day. Thanks!

## **Morning Goodbyes**

Starting a preschool program is filled with mixed emotions for both the parent/s and the child since this is often the first time a child will be away from their family. Goodbyes with our little ones are never easy, and as a mother of two, I have firsthand experience with this. Here are some tips for smoother goodbyes:

- \* Leading up to their first day, you will want to give your child as much quality time and attention as possible, so that your child will not be especially missing you during their first weeks. You will also want to re-establish a good home daily rhythm (meals and bedtimes for example), as this often, during the summer months, becomes looser.
- \* Talk with your child about what to expect at Singing Tree in a positive way. Let them know we will sing songs, make music, read stories, create art, make friends, and PLAY!
- \* Parent/s and Caregivers should be confident and positive at drop-off. Children pick up the nervous energy of their parent/s. If a child feels like you are worried, then they may feel worried. Do your best (I know it can be hard) to show them you are confident and they will do well.

- \* Keep your goodbyes consistently short and sweet so that your child knows what to expect. I recommend less than 5 minutes. Prolonging departures often make goodbyes MUCH harder.
- \* It might be tempting to sneak out, but your little one may feel more afraid if you suddenly disappear. Develop a good-bye ritual, such as a special hug or handshake.
- \* Once you have said your goodbyes, it's best to skedaddle so that your child doesn't become preoccupied by your presence. Seeing your child involved in an activity is a good cue that it's time for you to go.

When you come to pick up your child, allow your child to vent their sadness if needed, but don't sympathize. (Validate feelings, but don't say things like "It was terrible, wasn't it." or "Did you have a terrible day?" Simply respond kindly with "I'm sorry you were so sad." and/or "I can tell that it wasn't fun when I left.") Then, after all of the BAD parts are shared, encourage your child to share with you the GOOD things! If they can't come up with them on their own, come up with some prompts of your own. "Did you meet new friends? Did you sing some songs?"

During the "Arrival" time (9:00am - 9:15am) I will have an offering on the community table for children to engage with as they arrive. I have found that this helps with the transition into a child's learning environment, and allows us to begin our morning community circle time together. I strongly encourage you to arrive during this window of time. This allows your child the time necessary to settle into their learning space before we "officially" begin our day. Children who arrive late often have a more challenging time getting settled into the morning rhythm.

It is completely normal for a child to have a hard goodbye at some point (sometimes even after they have been coming for awhile). I want to reassure you

that I am well practiced with this, and that I am here to help you with this transition. It may be that you need to hand your tearful child off into my caring arms, and that is ok! I may even approach you, and gently bring your child into the space myself if I observe that may be what is needed. This is a cue for the parent to leave, while I work my magic with the child to engage them in the space. I have found from extensive practice that it is better to quickly transition them into the space, because a child will otherwise continue to spiral deeper into distress and it will take much longer to recenter them; furthermore, their distress may cause other children distress. Please be reassured that I have a 15 minute rule.... If a child does not stop crying or settle into the day approximately 15 minutes after the parent/caregiver has left, I will contact you. In other words, if you do not hear from me, that means your child is doing well. I will always call/text you if your child cannot, for whatever reason, settle into the day. I would never let a child be unhappy the whole day. Most children are usually fine within 5-10 minutes of their parent leaving. It may not always feel easy at drop-off, but it is well worth the effort!

If your child is experiencing severe separation anxiety, please communicate this with me (in advance) so that we can work together to have a plan to help transition your child into their learning environment.

### **Parent/s & Caregivers in Singing Tree Space**

Before the beginning of the program year, I will invite parents/caregivers and enrolled children into the space for an opportunity to explore their learning environment, and to meet fellow children and families. I would like to encourage you

to take advantage of this day if you are able. Children will feel more safe and comfortable in their new learning environment if they are able to explore it first with their caregivers and friends to be.

Once the program year begins, I respectfully request that parents/caregivers refrain from hanging around in the space (inside and outside). This is so I can protect the energy of the learning environment for ALL of the children. Well-intended adults, often do not fully realize that their presence is disrupting the learning space, and preventing children from sinking into their own important exploration. I understand how hard it is to say goodbye to your child, particularly if it is their first time away from their family, AND please understand that prolonged goodbyes or parent/s presence disrupt the children's group dynamic which needs to be developed as soon as possible. Young children want to both please and mirror their parent/s. If you are there, you are irresistible especially if they are a bit anxious about being away from their family. It can be hard and confusing for some children to fully engage with the group and the space if their parent or caregiver is present. It also makes other children confused to see some parent/s linger, but not their own. The first few months of the program are especially a crucial time for the children and I to forge a lasting bond with each other, and to settle into the flow and rhythm of the day. Remember that children are working towards independence. However, if your child is experiencing severe separation anxiety, please communicate this with me ahead of time so that we can work together to have a plan to help transition your child into the classroom. Thank you for all of your support with this.

Adults should refrain from chatting with other parents while inside the space (at drop-off) or just outside the door (sound travels loudly). This is a disruption to the group. You are welcome to chat and/or make plans with other parents outside of the play yard. Thank you for understanding :)

Once the children and I have settled into the flow of the program year, I would love to invite interested families in for scheduled offerings. If you have an expertise that you would like to share (ex. job, hobby, family culture, a language, instrument, skill, collection, artifacts, stories, music/song(s), art/craft experience, etc.) please contact me to set-up a day and time. We would be so honored and grateful to have your offering(s) contributed to our learning community! Offerings are an exciting opportunity to spark a new interest, or a more in-depth learning experience for a child. While in the space, I respectfully request that all adults are fully engaged, participate with the group, and refrain from using a cellphone as this can be very distracting. Children look to adults, especially their own caregiver, for "cues." If a parent is unengaged while the group is singing a song or listening to a story, for example, children are likely to become unengaged too. Caring adults are a wonderful role-model for young children! Thank you for supporting your child's learning environment!

## **Special Guests**

I very occasionally invite special guests from the community (ex. local children's author, local artist, local musician, etc.) to visit Singing Tree and briefly share their area of expertise with the children. These visits are usually scheduled during morning circle or end of day circle. These special guests are invited with the intent of sparking a new thread of interest with the children, and to further enrich our program. I usually have special guests visit during the second half of the program year, after we have had ample time to forge a solid flow together. I will give families a heads up before anyone visits Singing Tree.



## **Photos**

Photos that I capture of your child/ren having sweet moments during the program day will be periodically texted to you. Photos are taken as a courtesy to give you a glimpse into your child's world at Singing Tree. If your family does NOT want me to text you these photos, or text you in general, please let me know. I will only take photos of your child if you have given me consent to do so on the photo permission form.

## **Illness**

Everyone gets sick sometimes. For most young children, getting a little sick occasionally actually builds and strengthens their immune system. If your child is sick, please keep them at home in consideration for others. At home is where a sick child can get the extra love, rest, and care they need. If your child has had a temperature over 99 degrees, rash, vomiting, or diarrhea in the past 24 hour, please do not bring your child in. If during the program day a child develops any symptoms, the parent/caregiver will be contacted immediately to pick up their child. Symptoms may include fever, vomiting, diarrhea, excessive nasal or chest congestion, discharge from the eyes or ears, head lice, or symptoms of communicable disease such as chickenpox or pink eye. A sick child will be isolated from other children as much as possible, and made as comfortable as possible while waiting to go home. Please do not medicate your child with over the counter products in order to send them to our program. Please let me know if your child will be absent due to illness or otherwise. Thank you!

## **Medication, Medicine, and Skin Care Products**

I cannot be responsible for a child's medication. When possible, please arrange the child's medication schedules so that they do not need to take it during the program day. If necessary, the parent/caregiver may come in to administer the dose at the appropriate time. Please coordinate this in advance with me if necessary. DO NOT send your child to school with medication of any kind to take by themselves, or keep medication in your child's bag! This is extremely dangerous to all children! If a child were to drop their medicine on the floor, it could be consumed by another child.

I am unable to give or provide a child with any form of medicine (this includes prescription medications, and over the counter medicines such as Benadryl, Tylenol, etc.) and/or any type of skin care products (such as hydrogen peroxide, Neosporin, sunscreen, etc.) at any time or for any reason. I do clean small wounds/scrapes and apply bandaids as necessary, but I do not apply ointments of any kind. If it becomes apparent that a child is need of medicine during the school day, the child's parent/caregiver will be notified, and if necessary, emergency medical services will be alerted.

On sunny days, we will spend significantly more time outside, so if you feel that your child may need sunscreen, please put it on your child prior, and/or you may send your child with sun-shielding gear such as a sun hat, sun shirt, sunglasses, etc. Families have different preferences regarding sun-protection, as well as some children may be allergic or sensitive to sunscreen, so families can choose whatever is best for your child's needs.

## **Physical, Emotional, and Social Needs**

As a non-state-funded program, I am not able to meet the needs of all types of kids. Certain learning differences do not “show up” as problematic in my program since we are a mixed age group and I celebrate the uniqueness of each child’s learning path. Please understand the ultimate responsibility for the physical, emotional, and social needs of your child lies with the family. I will proactively work with families to best meet reasonable needs as much as possible. Singing Tree is not set up to screen for or serve needs that require professional diagnosis and treatment, and I take no responsibility therefore. These might include, but are not limited to, differences in learning, speech, hearing, vision, neurological, and psychiatric abilities. It is the parent(s)/guardian(s) sole responsibility, in cooperation with their health care provider, to recognize, diagnose and treat any needs for your child, and to inform the facilitator as to ways that the child can best be supported; however, Singing Tree does not warrant or guarantee that it will be in a position to provide such support, and I make no warranties or guarantees as to the efficacy, substance, or outcome of such support. I want your child to thrive in an appropriate learning environment that has the resources your child needs.

## **Program Year Calendar**

Singing Tree will in general follow the Port Townsend Public School District’s calendar and procedures in determining when to close for snow, breaks, and holidays. Before the beginning of the program year, I will email all families

important dates to mark in your calendars. If the district determines that due to weather that schools will be cancelled for the day, then I will follow accordingly for everyone's safety. There are built-in snow makeup days in the calendar year to be utilized as needed. You can also view the calendar of dates on the district's website at [www.ptschools.org](http://www.ptschools.org). Please disregard the "Early Release" portion of the schedule as this does not apply to Singing Tree.

### **Singing Tree Family Day**

Before the beginning of the program year, I will invite parents/caregivers and enrolled children into the space for an opportunity to explore their learning environment, and to meet fellow children and families. I would like to encourage you to take advantage of this day if you are able. Children will feel more safe and comfortable in their learning environment if they are able to explore it first with their caregivers and friends to be. The date for this will be emailed to all enrolled families prior to the program year beginning, along with other important dates.

### **Singing Tree End of Year Family Potluck & Graduation Ceremony**

At the end of the program year, we close with a Singing Tree family potluck and graduation ceremony for the children who will prepare to embark on their next adventure. We celebrate the closing of a magical year together, spend time with fellow Singing Tree families, eat delicious food together, and we conclude with a

very special ceremony for sending off children who are preparing to launch into their Kindergarten year and beyond. The younger Singing Tree children LOVE to witness their older peers going through their graduation ceremony, and eagerly await their turn in due time. The date for this will be emailed to enrolled families along with the other important dates prior to the beginning of the program year.

## Daily Flow

The daily flow is a general rhythm of a typical day at Singing Tree; However, I believe strongly in following the cues of children, so if children are deeply engaged in a particular activity or uninterested in an activity then we will spend more or less time on that activity accordingly. We also follow the cues of the weather (and mother nature's gifts), and we will often spend even more time outdoors if something entices us: a glorious sunny day, a snowy day, a rainy day, or perhaps a tree frog hopping by outside the window may beckon us! Our day is fluid but held in a gentle rhythm. Before the program day begins, I will be busy preparing the space for the day, so please do not drop your child off any earlier than 9am, and please pick up your child up on time at 1 pm. You are welcome to play outside with your child a few minutes before the doors open to begin our day. Thank you.

### **8:45am-9am Optional Outdoor Transition Time**

If families would like some extra arrival transition time in the morning, you are invited to arrive during this time, and allow your child to play and explore the outside space with Parent/Guardian. Children **MUST** be supervised by you, and

Children must NOT be left unsupervised. This is not an early drop-off. Some children benefit from having a little play time with their caring adults before their Singing Tree day begins. The door to the inside space is kept locked until 9am when our day officially begins.

### **9:00am - Arrival: Good Morning!**

Children will enter each morning to hear gentle and inviting music. They will remove their shoes and place them on the shoe shelf, and then place their personal belongings in their cubby. They are then ready to join the group in the Atelier (art area).

### **9:00am-9:30am - Creative Art Time in the Atelier**

The Atelier (art area) is available for the children to explore throughout the day, and during this time we will dive into creative exploration as a group and introduce and explore the art materials together. This time allows us to dive into creation (helpful for children to have smoother transition into the space), while greeting one another. This is a wonderful time for me to introduce the children to various art mediums, and to model how to care for the materials in a respectful way. During this time, children can choose from a variety of creative activities including a weekly-changing process art offering at the main community table, "tinker" area (open-ended creative construction), art desk, chalkboard, wall sensory boards, and buddah boards. The children are encouraged to try any or all of the options available at that time. Children are encouraged to make what they desire, and there is no push for them to have a finished "product," just so they

have something to show their families. Children are allowed time to explore materials in a way that is meaningful to them.

### **9:30-10am - Community Circle Time**

In community circle time, We gather to explore a variety of things including reading stories, telling stories, singing, music-making with a variety of instruments, felt-board plays, finger-plays, discussions, creative movement play, simple yoga, parachute play, and dancing with scarves and ribbons. Through these creative and playful explorations, children are in fact practicing early-learning reading skills such as vocabulary (knowing the names of things), print motivation (being interested in and enjoying books), print awareness (noticing print and how to handle a book), alphabetic knowledge (knowing letters are different from each other, and knowing their names and sounds), narrative skills (being able to describe things and events and tell stories), and phonological awareness (being able to hear and play with the smaller sounds in words). A young child's brain grows rapidly. Storytelling, singing, dancing, playing, and making music stimulates their minds, fosters a life-long love of learning, develops language skills, and lays a foundation for later reading success- all in a fun and casual setting. Children who are read to discover that books are fun, become good listeners, understand their world better, and experience beautiful art in picture books.

### **10:00am-10:15am - Community Snack Time**

### **10:15am-11:30am - Indoor Play Exploration**

(On exceptionally gorgeous days, we may decide to go outside instead!)



Children will explore their indoor learning environment that has been staged to provoke play. Singing Tree has a light table, nature table, farmer's market/store area, pretend garden, homemaker area, play kitchen, dress-up clothes, miniature fairy and gnome tree fort world, dollhouse, creative building block area, marble runs, puppets and puppet tree, library, art area, and a Pacific North West adventure area with tent and campfire.

### **11:30am-12pm - Community Lunch**

Whether we eat inside at the community table or outside on the picnic table, we will sit together and use this time to nourish and replenish our bodies with nutritious food, hydrate, socialize, practice manners, and listen to stories. Please send your child to school with a healthy lunch and snack. Children are also encouraged to eat and drink water at any time throughout the day if they feel hungry or thirsty. Having a community lunch time allows everyone to pause and emerge from their deep play to replenish their bodies.

### **12pm-1pm - Outdoor Play Exploration**

Children will explore their outdoor learning environment every day in rain or shine, so please dress your child in comfortable layers and good playing shoes. The outdoor space is staged to provoke play. On "drier" weather days, I bring out various items from the inside space, and set them up on the various tables in the patio area. There is also a large construction themed sensory box, water sensory table, weaving stand, art easel, a large sand play area, mud kitchen and mud making station, a variety of toys, loose parts, hula hoops, balls, climbing/swinging ropes, and a large grassy area perfect for running and play! The sand play area is large

enough for the entire group to immerse themselves in sand play together. There are many loose-parts available for the children to integrate into their sand play- seashells, sea glass, jewels, driftwood, pipes, funnels, various dishes, and more! The sand area is also framed with a tree stump balancing-walking path. The outdoor tree stump space, we use to gather for stories, songs, and for our end of day closing circle. When not being used as a group, it becomes a fantastical play-space... a rocket ship, an airplane, a boat, and more. The tree stumps here also serve as a natural balance walking path, and the children love the challenge of walking along the stumps! Our Singing Tree Living Fairy Garden is our "heart space." This has been co-created by me and the children over the years, and it evolves and changes regularly. And... real fairies live here :)

### **12:50pm Closing Circle**

We will gather together for final songs, games, and thoughts for the day. We use this time to explore a brief mindful meditation exercise and/or deep breathing exercise. While our singing bowl sings to our ears, the children inhale and exhale deeply. We take turns verbalizing what brought us the most joy and gratitude during our adventures and play that day. We finish with a sprinkle of fairy wishing dust. (The fairy wishing dust is biodegradable)

### **1pm- Goodbye**

Children will be playing outside until their caregiver arrives. Please make contact with me prior to leaving so that I know children are leaving with the appropriate person. Thank you.

## **Enrollment**

It is important to me that families who enroll in my program do so because it is a good fit with their family. If you are thinking about enrolling your child at a Singing Tree, please first thoroughly read everything on my website- the "Family Handbook," the 2 "Risk Competency" articles, the "Frequently Asked Questions," and the "About Me" section. I also invite you to read "Family Testimonials," "Magical Memories," and to peruse the "Singing Tree Photo Album" and the "Singing Tree Photo Tour." I understand that it is a lot to read and digest. My intent is to communicate with you as much as possible up front, and to give you an overall understanding of what Singing Tree has to offer. The purpose of my family handbook, policies, and procedures is to offer everyone clear communication, expectations, and boundaries, for a harmonious engagement with each other. If anything still feels unclear, please reach out to me with any questions or clarifications you may have.

## **Policies and Procedures**

Enrollment is open to children generally ages 3-5 years old. If your child is nearly 3 years old at the start of the program year (September), please contact me to discuss if your child is ready for the preschool learning environment. I have taken children as young as 2.5 who are ready for a preschool program if it works with current group dynamics. Some children choose to stay an extra year before embarking on their Kindergarten adventure as well. Every child is unique in their readiness. Group sizes are limited to 8 - 10 children maximum per day. I balance my groups as much as possible.

I am not set up for diapered children. Children must be generally comfortable using toilets (children cannot arrive in diapers or "pull-ups") to be ready for this program. Toileting accidents are completely normal for young children and therefore understood.

#### Admission Procedures:

The following steps must be completed to secure a spot for your child and to be officially enrolled at Singing Tree.

1. Singing Tree "Family Handbook," "About Me," "Frequently Asked Questions," and the 2 "Risk Competency" articles must be read and understood. I also invite you to read "Family Testimonials," "Magical Memories," and to peruse the "Singing Tree Photo Album" and the "Singing Tree Photo Tour."
2. Complete a "Singing Tree Interest Form" and email to me (unless you are a returning family).
3. Schedule and attend an in-person meeting with me, parent/s, and your child (unless you are a returning family)
4. Enrollment paperwork completed in full
5. Enrollment fee paid - Non-Refundable
6. Supply fee paid- Non-Refundable

Enrollment fee for 2 days is a one-time payment of \$120;

Supply fee for 2 days is a one-time payment of \$180;

(Total fees for 2 days for both enrollment fee and supply fee is \$300)

Enrollment fee for 4 days is a one-time payment of \$240

Supply fee for 4 days is a one-time payment of \$360

(Total fees for 4 days for both enrollment fee and supply fee is \$600)

These fees are paid when a spot has been offered to your child to secure their spot. Enrollment and supply fees will be paid by check and mailed to me, along with your child's enrollment paperwork, and I will provide you with the address at that time. If you are a returning family, you may hand this in at drop-off or pick-up time as well. If Singing Tree is full and your family has been added to my wait list, no fees will be required until space becomes available.

#### **Enrollment Options and Tuition:**

Singing Tree program hours are from 9am - 1pm, Tuesday-Friday

2-Day Enrollment Options: **Tuesdays & Thursdays** OR **Wednesdays & Fridays**

Cost: \$325/month ; I accept cash or check payments made payable to "Mirandy Cook." I do not accept credit card payments.

4-Day Enrollment Option: **Tuesdays - Fridays**

Cost: \$625/month; I accept cash or check payments made payable to "Mirandy Cook." I do not accept credit card payments.

I am unable to offer drop-in days or different days than stated above to enroll. I have set up enrollment to have essentially two cohesive groups. The group

dynamic will naturally be different within each group. I want to set children up for success, and having consistent and cohesive groups creates a space where they can dive more deeply into their peer relationships. I have found that having a child enrolled for just one day a week is too infrequent, and therefore, an unsuccessful option for a child. With only one day a week in the program, the learner is unable to really submerge fully into the program and community culture. I work very hard to balance my groups. When expressing interest to possibly enroll your child at Singing Tree, please let me know how many days you are considering, whether there are any enrollment days that will not work for your family, or if your family is flexible with any enrollment days that space is available for. I do my best to accommodate preferences and requests, while also keeping the groups balanced overall.

Each month's tuition is due on the 25th of the previous month and will be considered late if received after the 25th of the month. I accept payments made by check (payable to "Mirandy Cook") or by cash. For cash payments, please try to have exact amount ready, but I am sometimes able to make change. I do not accept credit cards for payment. If tuition is late, a late fee of \$50 will be charged in addition. Checks returned for insufficient funds carry a \$50 returned check fee in addition.

Tuition will be the same amount each month regardless of the number of program days in the month. **Tuition is divided equally into 10 payments** and paid over the course of the September through June program year. Due to holidays, closures and the total number of weeks in each month, some months will have more program days than others. You may also pay for the entire year at once.

I require 45 days written notice if you intend to leave the program or change your child's enrollment. Tuition for this 45 day period is due immediately. I will bill for 45 days tuition in the case of no notice.

I do not offer makeup days due to a child's illness, absent days, or personal vacation. The only makeup days will be for if I am out sick (I have a strong immune system and I am very rarely sick), and for snow closures. I will follow the Port Townsend Public School District's calendar and procedures in determining when to close for snow, breaks, and major holidays. There are built-in snow make-up days throughout the calendar year that will be used as needed to make up missed days due to snow closures or my own absence.

### **Right to Withdraw:**

The goal of Singing Tree is to provide a positive, enriching, early childhood learning environment. It is the right of the Singing Tree to withdraw a child at any time when in the best interest of the child and/or Singing Tree. I reserve the right to require the withdrawal of a child either on a temporary or permanent basis if:

- \* The child's behavior endangers the physical or mental health of the other children;
- \* Singing Tree decides it is necessary for reasons regarding behavior, emotional disturbances, health, adjustment, and/or if I determine the child's educational/ personal needs cannot be met by Singing Tree;



- \* Tuition is repeatedly late or unpaid;
- \* The parent/s fail to abide by Singing Tree policies and procedures (as indicated in Family Handbook).
- \* In the event a child is withdrawn from Singing Tree, or asked to leave, no part of the tuition paid for the month and/or deposits paid will be refunded.

### **Waiting Pool:**

Singing Tree retains a waiting pool if full. I also retain a list of families that are interested in future enrollment as well, so that I can email interested families information for the program year they are interested in. If you would like to be added to my waiting pool or future-interest list, please first thoroughly explore my website and read the Singing Tree "Family Handbook," "About Me," "Frequently Asked Questions," and the 2 "Risk Competency" articles to get an overall sense of my program. You are also invited to read "Family Testimonials," and peruse the "Singing Tree Photo Album." If Singing Tree sounds like a good fit for your child and family, please complete the "Singing Tree Interest Form" and email to me. I will then add your family's to my waiting pool. If a spot becomes available, I will begin giving tours to interested families. I maintain balanced groups as much as possible.

### **Singing Tree Tours:**

During enrollment time, or as space becomes available, I will offer interested families tours outside of the program hours. Prior to your scheduled

tour, please make sure you have completed your "Singing Tree Interest Form." During your scheduled visit, your family will see the Singing Tree space, meet me in person, and ask any questions you may have. Beforehand, please thoroughly read everything on my website- the "Family Handbook," the 2 "Risk Competency" articles, the "Frequently Asked Questions," and the "About Me" section, so that we may use your scheduled visit for more specific questions that you may have. I do not schedule tours during the program hours, because my focus must remain on the children, and it is disruptive to ALL of children to have a constant flow of visitors. If after your visit your family is still interested, I will then add your child's name to my pool of names as I begin to fill spot/s. If a spot is offered to your child, your family will have one week to make a final decision on accepting that spot and enrolling your child or not, before the spot may be offered to another family on my list.

